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Martha Amby
Johansen

NARRATOR

INTERVIEWER P. Lotz

PLACE Ranch, Buellton

DATE April 28, 1988

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Interview with Martha Amby Johansen
Date of Interview: April 28, 1998, Johansen Ranch, Buellton
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

Could we begin with a little about your background?

Mrs. J: I was born in Nebraska and when I was seven, the family moved to South Dakota where we rented land on the Indian Reservation. In 1938 we came to California because my mother's uncle who had raised her, wanted her to come and take over his orchard in Solvang. His name was Peter Petersen. The family would not come unless every one came so all my brothers and sisters came out here, and two days after I arrived I got a job at the Solvang Hotel, which later burned down, the location is now the Solvang Motel, Alsial and Mission Drive.

PL: How old were you when you came to Solvang?

Mrs. J: I was 18 and 1/2.

PL: Where was this orchard of Mr Petersen's located?

Mrs. J: In Fredensborg Canyon. It has changed hands many times and the farm site is gone, there are many homes in there now.

PL: What sort of work did you do at the hotel?

Mrs. J: I was a waitress.

PL: Had you finished school in South Dakota?

Mrs. J: Yes, I had finished high school.

PL: How did you feel about coming to California?

Mrs. J: Well, at that time it was a big adventure. I can't remember who operated the hotel in those days. I did work with Polly Carricaburu Fredricksen there. At that particular time there were many oil drillers here in the Valley working at the Chamberlain Ranch, out of Los Olivos. We were very busy with all the rooms full. It was the only hotel around then. The men ate two meals at the hotel and took their lunches to work, in the evenings we had to make up the lunches for the men.

PL: How were conditions here in Solvang during those Depression days?

Mrs. J: That was the reason why my parents went back to Nebraska, they could not find steady employment here. After my parents left my great uncle Petersen sold the property there in Fredensborg, there were 12 acres on a hillside. About this time I met Mr. Amby and we were married in 1940 and I moved out to the dairy 2 miles west of Buellton. We had gotten acquainted when he came in to eat at the hotel. We would go to events at the Dania Lodge where there were card games and other activities, pot lucks, etc. Solvang was real nice at that time, a small community and twice a year Nielsen and Rasmussen store would have a free

breakfast for everyone in town. We went to the movies at Axel Nielsen's theater on Alisal Dr.

PL: Tell me about Mr. Amby?

Mrs. J: He was born in Denmark and came to the U.S. when he was 20. He stayed in Minnisota for awhile and then went to Seattle where he had a dairy. He learned about our Valley and came down here and started a dairy west of Buellton where later George Johansen had his dairy, and now the location of the Wilemsen's, Santa Ynez Valley Dairy. Mr. Amby leased land from a Portuguese family. Later he lost the lease and moved to this present location, 2 miles west of Buellton.

PL: Why this particular location?

Mrs. J: The land was for lease, it had buildings on it, a dairy and house and had been owned by Mary Larsen who was then living in Hollywood. The Larsens had come to the Valley with the original Danish-American Colony. They didn't really have a diary but they were milking from 12 to 14 cows so had a small operation but after Mr. Amby came the buildings were enlarged. In those days you put the milk in ten gallon cans and then they were hauled to market or delivery man stoppped by. Ken FitzGerald was our delivery man for awhile. We kept the milk fresh in a cooler until Ken FitzGerald stoppped by and pick it up to haul it to Santa Barbara. This was early in the morning so we had

two milkings worth for him to pick up, then the empty cans would be delivered back to us.

PL: How large a herd did you have?

Mrs. J: I imagine close to 100. I had a choice when we were married, either to stay in Solvang or come out to the farm. If I stayed in Solvang I decided I would never see my husband so I came to the dairy. At that time we had my husband's brother living with us and three hired men. If we hired a married man, we would rent a home for them. But for the single men we had room for them here at the house. There is 160 acres on both side of Highway 246 and we grew alfalfa and corn for silage which we kept in the big red barn.

PL: Tell me about a typical day?

Mrs. J: We would have breakfast at seven in the morning, lunch was at 11:30 and at 3 we had coffee and pastry, and at 7, dinner. They would start milking at 3 a.m. and would be finished by 6:30. Then it started all over again in the afternoon. With the electric milker, 14 cows could be milked a once, they had to wash the udder of each cow before putting the milk machine on. The milk was then put into a big tank and that went over a cooler and then was sent into the next can. There was a float so that when one can was full, it automatically went to the next can. It took two men to do the milking, one to put the machine

on each cow, and one who would strip, the other men did the feeding and worked in the fields. One hundred cows a day and there was no hand milking.

PL: I have been told that at one time there were 11 dairies here in the Santa Ynez Valley?

Mrs. J: Yes, there was George Johansen, Carl and Ted Christensen, Herman Buchardi, Alfred Jacobsen, the Salm Dairy, Archie Hunt dairy, Martin Jacobsen, Tom Petersen. And across the river on the south side was Petan that the Ritters bought, and the Live Oak Dairy that the Bazzi owned. The Christensen, Johansen dairies were in Buellton, the Alfred Jacobsen dairy was on Buell Flat, Buchardi was in Solvang, Martin Jacobsen had his dairy on Baseline, Santa Ynez. That dairy is the only one operating at the present. Martin had a dairy in Lompoc before coming to Santa Ynez. All along Buell Flat were dairies before the horse ranches came in. Hastings Harcourt bought all that land on Buell Flat for speculation.

PL: Why did these farmers sell out?

Mrs. J: I think they were tired (this happened in the early 1960's) the older you became and the children were not interested in going into the business. When Martin and Alfred Jacobsen first came to this area they worked for Petan, on the south side of Santa Ynez River, out of Buellton.

PL: Did most of those dairies operate the way you did?

Mrs. J: Yes, they operated the same, some had more married couples working on the farm than we did.

PL: Was it a hard life?

Mrs. J: No, I enjoyed it, in the sense that it was one big family. Where there is a will, there is a way.

PL: What was Mr. Amby's first name?

Mrs. J: Peter Amby. He died in 1951. He had been ill for about four years and in those days they did not have the diagnostic ways that we have today. He had an enlarged spleen and they removed that but he hemmoredged internally and died. We had been married 11 years. We had sold the cows before he died, you see all these dairies belonged to the Santa Barbara Milk Producers Association and the way they worked is that you bought cows that had quotas and then with what ever you producted your quota would increase. You were only allowed to produce and sell so many pounds of butterfat. Then the extra milk had a cheaper price. In the 1950 they decided to go into the stainless steel holding tanks so we decided that seeing how my husband was ill we would sell our herd. The stainless steel tanks were big enough to hold all the milk from your two milkings a day. The milk was cooled before it went into the tanks. With the new bigger tanks it was a lot easier because you didn't have to watch all those

ten gallons tanks being filled up. The Producers Association bought these big trucks that you now see on the highways, the big shiny silver trucks. In the meantime they had mechanized the milking system so that it was all piped so you didn't have to carry the buckets. These pipes made it very easy. It was going to be a big expense for us to do all this so we sold the herd. Some of the other dairies in the Valley bought the good producers because they could then increase their quotas and the rest went to the sales yard.

PL: How did you select the cows in the first place?

Mrs. J: Mr. Johansen and the Christensens raised their own calves, the heifers, and they had mostly Gernseys and Jerseys but we had mostly Holsteins here. The Holsteins producted more milk but not the amount of butter fat. That is the choice of the farmer as to which breed of cow he wants. And they still had to be freshened each year. You always kept some dry cows as they would be with calf. There was quite a system to it all. My husband had to keep track of each cow as to when she was with calf and when she was milkinng. All the cows were tested every so often. They also had all the cows numbered with tags so it kept the bookkeeping a little easier. And there came a time when a cow was not economical anymore so those were put in another pasture and given cheaper hay. I guess the life of a good milk cow is four to five years. You see they

were fed very heavy with grains plus the alfalfa and you are constantly buying and selling cows.

PL: Did you make any money?

Mrs. J: In the early days we only broke even but then when the war (World War II) started there was more demand for milk and so we bought more cows and we did make a profit. During those days the association bought a truck and hired a driver.

PL: After the war was there less demand for milk?

Mrs. J: Well, I think it was about the same, the government was buying up milk and making powdered milk so we did have good sales and they were also buying surplus butter.

PL: I saw on a T.V. documentary that the dairy men during the Depression dumped their milk rather than sell at such low prices, did that happen here do you know?

Mrs. J: As I remember they would feed the young calves and pigs on milk but I don't remember any dumping. We never poared milk out as long as I was here at the dairy. I don't think subsidizing the dairymen is a good idea, there is too much cheese and butter in storage now. The government has come up with a 8 (?) year plan to cut back dairy herds and some of the dairymen were glad to get out of the business, others are now raising heifers ~~and~~ to start up again after the 8 years is up. I don't like this

subsiding because back in Nebraska and other mid-west states there are so many poor farmers that are completely shut off because the wealthy farmers have come in and put down wells and planted crops so that it has flooded the markets. Supply and demand should take care of the dairy business.

PL: How did you meet Mr. Johansen?

Mrs. J: I had known him for many years as we were neighbors. Mr. Amby and Mr. Johansen were friends. Mr. Johansen was born in Denmark and came to America in 1925. His wife died in 1952, they had three children who were here alot and they liked me and I liked them so we decided to get married and combine the two families. Mr. Johansen sold all his cows to Jake Wilemsen and Jake had a dairy there for 10 to 12 years and has recently sold all his cows and intends to build a mobile home park on his land west of Buellton.
End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

PL: Where was the Santa Barbara Milk Producers Association located?

Mrs. J: North of State Street, I can't remember the street. This was a collection place, I think they used some of the milk delivered and sent the rest to Los Angeles. All the butter was made in Los Angeles. Golden State acted as a service center for all the local dairies. The Live Oak

Dairy out of Buellton owned by Bazzi had their own center. Bazzi moved here because the dairy they had in Santa Barbara grew too small, they were located south of Buellton where the Pork Palace is now. Tom Petersen who was a cousin to Andy Petersen had a dairy located on Alamo Pintado Rd. Archie Hunts was on Refugio Rd. The Salm Dairy was where Midland School is now. We didn't have much leisure time but if you rotated you could get one day off a week, and I always made a big roast and the men could help themselves if we were gone.

PL: Tell me about your children?

Mrs. J: Mae is the oldest and lives in Tulare, she has one daughter. Frank is next, he lives here near Buellton and has always been a butcher and works for Park Way Market. Ray, is also a butcher and works for El Rancho Market, Ray lives right next door to me, and my youngest is Joan, who lives in Yakama, Washington, and is a teacher. I had the four children in seven years. They enjoy each other. Then I have three step-children, Guner, who lives in the Valley, Eleanor lives in New Jersey, and Maryanna lives in Sacramento.

PL: In early Solvang, before there was a milk producers, how did the dairymen sell their milk products?

Mrs. J: I think in those days on each farm there was a room called the milk house and there was a place for a separator and I

think it was all done by hand and each dairyman did his own processing, and it was unpasturized. There was a creamery in Solvang on West Copenhagne where the milk and butter and cream was taken. And the Buchardis had a delivery service to customers.

I should say here that I never enjoyed anything so much as going out with a clean cup to scoop off two or three cups of cream after milking, we always had whipping cream, fresh and wonderful.

PL: Do you know any of the history of the Milk Producers Association?

Mrs. J: I don't know anything about that. The men went to meetings monthly either in homes or to the restaurants. When it was my husband's turn, because we had this small house, he would have the meeting at a restaurant. All the dairies here belonged to the association and this organization helped keep prices up and made better conditons for the dairymen.

PL: Do you think Arne Jacobsen, out on Baseline will continue his dairy?

Mrs. J: I think so, with his two sons to carry on.

I think the Rivaldi Dairy near Lompoc is just waiting for the 8 years to go by so they can start up again, I see the young heifers on the land now. There is a new generation coming along. As far as the future of farming is

concerned they still have to have feed and milk and all the things that farming represents so the farmer will go on.

PL: Do you know anything about the Buchardi Dairy?

Mrs. J: They came from Fresno, with the early Danes, Johannes Buchardi started the dairy west of Solvang, and after his father died, Herman took over the operation with the help of his son, Harlan. That land is now being developed for homes and condos by Patt Moore so there will be about 80 houses and 17 condos there soon.

PL: Thank you, Mrs. Johansen for this interview today.